

Advanced Theatre Play

Haenyeo, the Sea Woman



CAST

Michelle: Soonja

Eric: Choonje

Lydia: Malsook

John: Malbong

Olivia: Narrator

Script Written by: All members of the cast

< Scene 1 >

Scene begins with spotlight only on the left corner of stage. The setting is a small room with a closet and some clothes on the floor. Olivia enters and begins to go through her old clothes. She looks as if she is cleaning up. She finds a diving suit and appears to reminisce. She then holds the diving suit to her chest and speaks.

Olivia: Ah there you are. Hello old friend. I remember you well. How many wonderful and difficult times we had together. (smiling) Why I still remember the day I got you. God knows I didn't want you back then. But I was young... innocent, and frankly... a little naive. I never knew how much you would change my life. Forever.

< Scene 2 >

Lights lower, a new scene appears on stage. It is morning, the sun is shining brightly with waves splashing and sea gulls crying. Soonja (the younger Olivia) is walking along a pier looking around at the scenery. She looks confused. She has a piece of paper in her hand and looks as if she is following directions. It is clear by her facial expression that she does not wish to be in her current location.

Soonja: (looking around with the paper in her hand) Where the hell am I? What is this place?

A man is in a boat on the water. He is dressed like a sailor (with a white shirt, white shorts, and a white hat). He looks over to Soonja, looks her up and down, smiles to himself and calls her over, winking.

Choonje: (in a super-greasy voice, with a shrimp tail dangling on his mouth) Hey beautiful. You look lost. Looking for your umma?

Soonja: (blushing) Hello there. Umm, do you know where I am right now?

Choonje: (smiling greasily) Your sweetest dream. Hahaha. Hey, did it hurt?

Soonja: Did what hurt?

Choonje: When you fell from heaven?

Soonja: (giggling) Oh. (she blushes deeply) Well. Of course it did.

Choonje: So... you got a name? Or shall I just call you gorgeous?

Soonja: (Stifling a giggle at the comment) No, I do have a name. My name is Soonja, but you can call me what you like. After all, I am gorgeous.

Choonje: Hahaha, of course you are. I'm Choonje. And you can call me what you like too. *(he laughs)*

Soonja: Then shall I call you ... my captain? *(blushing)*

Choonje: Hahaha, then I'll call you my little sunshine. *(leans forward)* So ... you got a number?

Soonja: Yes. But I need to see someone first. It looks like I'll be working here. If I survive my first day then you can have it.

Choonje: Well you're far too young, and far too gorgeous to be a haenyo. I've never seen one like you. You're like a delicate little flower that needs a gardener - like me. *(laughs)* Well I guess the only one who would know where to put you is Malsook. She has been a haenyo for over thirty years. If anyone knows, it's her. *(He gestures to the off stage "crowd".)* She's over there.

Soonja: Thanks. *(Michelle starts to go.)*

Choonje: Hey wait! Come back soon beautiful. I can't afford to lose you. *(Choonje winks at her and Michelle giggles)*

An aging woman of around 50 enters the stage with a haenyeo suit in her hands

Malsook: Ignore him. I'm Malsook. You must be Soonja. You're from Seoul, right? Your mother said you were in desperate need of growing up. And I can clearly see why.

Soonja: My mom's mistaken. You don't need to waste your time trying to teach me to grow up. I'm definitely a grown up.

Malsook: Oh, really? By the way that captain boy is looking at you. *(points to Choonje. Choonje is waving and winking at Soonja)* You'll be growing up the wrong way if we don't put a stop to it. Stay away from him. He's bad news kid.

Soonja: Choonje is a sweet guy. If he is interested, then so am I. Besides I don't see what business it is of yours. Wait, you're jealous, aren't you? *(smirking)*

Malsook: I'm "married." *(putting her arms crossed)* Fine. I guess you'll just have to find out from experience. Get your suit on. And don't think you can get away with not working hard here!

Soonja casts a glance at Choonje, who winks back at her. She giggles and walks past to the off stage group of haenyo. Choonje walks over. He stands next to Malsook.

Choonje: Hey. I should thank you. You've given me something to look at while I work. *(puts his tongue out)* Fresh meat.

Malsook: *(Malsook reaches out and grabs Choonje by the scruff of the neck)* Mess this one up for me and I'll wring more than just your neck boy!

Lights go off with Choonje's startled expression.

Narration: That was my first encounter with Malsook. Even at first glance, I could tell a lot of things about her. The scratches on her arms and legs told you she's been with the sea for quite some time. The wrinkles on her forehead told you she's counted storms in her life. And the deepness of her voice told you she was a wise, determined woman. But above all, there was this unknown sadness in her eyes. A sadness that I couldn't explain.

< Scene 3 >

Scene changes to Malsook's house. The house is small and simple and appears to be "poor". Malbong, Malsook's husband is drunk with 10 soju bottles around him (he's holding one of them). Malsook enters the house looking dead tired.

Malsook: What a long day. *(She sees Malbong singing with 10 soju bottles surrounding him. Malbong is drunk, making a scene of himself (ex: dancing Gee by SNSD and Mister by Kara))*

Malsook: Again... *With a sigh she starts picking up the soju bottles.*

Malbong: Malsook-ah! Guess how many bottles of soju I had today!

Malsook: I don't wanna know.

Malbong: *(puts up his finger, makes an 8)* TEN!!! I had 10 bottles today! HEEHEEHEE!

Malsook: Shut up.

Malbong: *(points his finger at her)* Uh huh! How dare you talk to your husband like that! *(wavers his finger)* Bad Malsook, bad Malsook. HEEHEEHEE!

Malsook: *(trying to pick up a bottle next to him)* Move.

Malbong: Oh, watch me, watch me. *(starts dancing Gee, laughing)* Sonyeoshidae is so hot! So much prettier than you! HEEHEEHEE!

Malsook: *(explodes)* I SAID MOVE!

Malbong: *(all of a sudden lies down on the floor; starts talking like a baby)* AHHHH! I'm hungry! Make me food!!!

Malsook takes one look at Malbong and with a sigh walks back to the kitchen area. Malbong is on the floor of the living room, now sleeping. As she is cooking, she silently starts to cry.

Malsook: *(Spotlight on Malsook. She picks up a soju bottle)* It's you. You're the reason my marriage is coming down. You're the one that made my husband like that! All he ever does is drink. I can't even concentrate at work. The whole 2 minutes while I'm underwater, the only thing on my mind is whether or not he had his lunch. As I reach my 20 meter limit, all I ever think about is if I don't come out alive, what will happen to him. Would he miss me? *(pause for a while, starts laughing)* No...He probably loves this more *(Malsook holds up the soju. She starts to cry)*. You know, there are times when I don't want to avoid those jellyfish and sharks. Times when I don't want to come out of the water. Times when I just want to give up this life. *(looks at the soju bottle, starts laughing)* Silly right? Talking to a soju bottle. *(pause)* At least you listen silently. My husband doesn't even do that. *(starts crying harder, head down)*

Malbong is mumbling something in the background.

Malsook: *(silently picks up her knife, wipes her tears, continues chopping the vegetables. She is still crying, light slowly goes off)*

Narration: I never knew where that unknown sadness in Malsook's eyes came from. I never knew it was her husband, the man she had to bear for 32 years. He was a secret she kept from everyone around her - not because she was embarrassed of him, but because she was embarrassed of herself not being able to leave him. I never knew the sadness in her eyes came from this secret that she had to bear for 32 years.

< Scene 4 >

Scene changes to next morning, at the beach. The sun is shining brightly and Soonja is watching along the shore with her haenyeo suit in her hands. Choonje is watching Soonja from far away.

Soonja: *(Walking along the shore)* God, why is this so heavy! *(looks up)* And why is the sun shining so brightly today! And why is the sea so far away! Ahhh, I hate the weather! I hate being a haenyeo! I hate everything! Gahhh, why do I have to ... *(she turns around, sees Choonje)* *(drastically changing her voice)* Hello!

Choonje: Good morning, my little sunshine! Isn't the weather beautiful today?

Soonja: Yes, that's exactly what I was thinking. The sun is shining so brightly and the sea is sparkling like little diamonds!

Choonje: This kind of weather doesn't come by everyday. I suppose the weather only shines when beautiful flowers like you come out to work.

Soonja: *(chuckling)* Oh, I love coming to work! Being a henyeo is all I've ever wanted to do!

Choonje: *(unbuttoning his shirt)* Well, being with you is all I've ever wanted to do!

(Malsook shows up and hits Choonje in the head)

Malsook: You greasy little! *(to Choonje)* Go to work! And Soonja, you follow me! *(walks to exit)*

Soonja: *(to Choonje)* I'll see you later, captain! Wait here! *(follows Malsook to exit)*

Choonje: *(waving back at Soonja)* Be back soon, my little sunshine!

(At the market)

Malsook: Come and look everybody! Here's some just caught fresh sea food!!

(Malbong enters the market. He is drunk again, dancing and singing in the market, making a scene)

Malbong: Malsook! Look, I learned a new dance today from my friend here. *(points to his soju bottle)* *(Malbong starts dancing Abracadabra)*

Malsook: *(fiercely looking at Malbong, sighs)*

Soonja: Who are you mister? Do you know us?

Malbong: *(Trying to drag Malsook)* No business on you young lady, let's go Malsook!

Malsook: I do not know you mister.

Malbong: You liar! You know me! You know me! I'm your husband! *(throws the fish that Malsook was selling)*

< Scene 5 >

Malbong is still creating a mess, and people around him are staring at him.

Malsook: *(silent for a while, suddenly packs her things)* Let's get out of here. *(grabs Soonja harshly by the wrist)*

The two women are outside the market, Malsook suddenly stops walking and looks down.

Soonja: *(looking carefully at Malsook)* What's wrong? Are you okay?

Malsook: It's none of your business.

Soonja: *(hears Malbong creating a mess)* Is that someone you know?

Malsook: *(starts laughing and looks down)* 32 years. *(looks up)* It's someone I've known for 32 years. *(laughing)* Funny. You never thought I'd be living with a man like that, right? Same for me, I never I thought I'd be living with a man like that - that I would waste 32 years of my life with that **bastard!** *(yells)* *(silent, all of a sudden shouting)* I had dreams, too, you know. When I was your age, I had my dreams too, like you! And it wasn't to jump in the sea every single day, **knowing** that I might just die one day from an accident. Everyday has been a battle of fear for me. And it still is. Because anything can happen when you're in the sea. But you know what I fear more than the sea? *(silent)* Myself. Seeing myself have no choice but to jump in that sea every single day *(pause)* to support my family.

Soonja: *(silent for a while)* Then why don't you just leave him?

Malsook: *(extremely emotional)* Because he's my husband. *(hand on chest, signifying the word "my")* **My** husband. Because he's the man I promised myself to love for the rest of my life, no matter what.

Soonja: But he's not keeping the promise! If he's not keeping the promise he made to himself, why should you?

(Malsook picks up her things and starts walking to exit stage)

Soonja: So it doesn't matter to you - whether you die or not from a storm one day? from a shark? from a shipwreck? All that doesn't matter to you? Is your husband so important to you that you would risk your life for him? for a drunk basatard that doesn't even care about you?

Malsook: *(stops, without looking back)* You did well today. I'll see you tomorrow morning. *exits*

Soonja: *(on stage, alone, starts picking up her things too, suddenly throws her things back on the floor)* I don't understand. I don't understand. Love? Marriage? Family? Why do we have to sacrifice ourselves to protect these things - things like husbands, children, and jobs! None of these should matter more than our own happiness, right? I don't understand why she can't leave her husband. And why thousands of other women can't leave their family. If she left him, she would be free. Free like the little girl she once was. like me. *(pause)* Is that what the future holds for me too? for all women of Jeju? Will I be living with a drunk bastard who does nothing but drink all day long? Will I have to sacrifice myself for a man that doesn't even care about me?

Women, we weren't born to be servants, victims, or slaves of men! We were born to nurture and be nurtured, respect and be respected, love and be loved. We were born to dream, explore the world, and live the life that we vision. *(hopelessly, crying)* But why is none of that true in what I see here? Why is there no one to pity us? Why is there nothing we can do to change our lives? *(kneels down)* Because I don't wanna be that ... I don't wanna be that ... I don't ...

(lights go off -> lights on to Olivia)

Narration: I was too young. I was too young to understand why Malsook couldn't leave her husband. As young as I was, I didn't know what it meant to love, marry, have a family, and sacrifice myself. But mostly, I was scared. I was scared that that could be what the future holds for me too.

< Scene 6 >

Scene shifts to next morning. Malsook is at home with Malbong, but Malsook is supposed to be at work. Malbong is in his bed, sick, and Malsook is in the kitchen, heating a towel for Malbong.

Malbong: *(starts coughing hard)*

Malsook: *(enters the room with the towel. She sits down next to him)* You created a mess yesterday.

Malbong: *silent*

Malsook: *(places the towel on his head)* Why did you do that.

Malbong: *(silent for a while, slowly, opens his mouth)* I needed more soju.

Malsook: *(gets up all of a sudden)* Soju? You did all that just for another bottle of soju? Everyday, you stay home drunk while I'm out there making a living that you eventually use up on that wretched soju.

Malbong: *(silent)* I feel sick.

Malsook: You know what? I'm sick too. I'm so sick. I've been sick for the last 32 years because of you. I'm sick and tired of everything! *(starts crying, puts her hand on her forehead)* Everyday, I go to work and jump into the sea knowing that I might die one day. Everyday, I come home, clean the house, and cook dinner. Everyday, I cry before I go to sleep, asking God what I ever did to deserve this. And I do all this because of you. Because I love you. Because I always think to myself that you'd change one day. But really ... I don't know if I can take it anymore ... *(drops to the floor)* Please, stop. Please come back to the person you used to be. The kind, loving man you were when I first met you. *(crying)*

Malbong: *(silent for a while)* I'm sorry.

Malsook: *(continues crying)*

Malbong: *(putting his hand on his forehead)* What happened to us. I don't know what happened to us. We used to love each other. We were supposed to be happy together. Oh, what happened to us. *(crying)*

I remember the night when I asked you to marry me and you said yes. I really was the happiest person in the world that day. And we were so happy together, as wife and husband. But few years later, when I lost my job, I felt like I lost all hope in myself. And when you said you'd become a haenyeo to make money, I couldn't hate myself more. I couldn't hate myself more for making my own wife risk her life to earn a living. *(picks up the soju bottle)* I think that's when I started drinking this. To forget about what kind of a miserable husband I was. *(starts crying)* It's all my fault. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

Malsook: *(patting Malbong's face)* Look at me. You were never a miserable husband, don't say that. Malbong, you're the best man I know. And the best I'll ever know.

Malbong: Don't say that. I wasted your life for such a long time. I don't want to waste your life anymore. I ... I don't know how to turn our marriage back to what it used to be.

Malsook: You can't by yourself. But we can do it together. Malbong, look at me. We can go back to what we used to be if we try together.

Malbong: I'm sorry *(hugs Malsook, wipes his tears)* I'm so sorry...

Malsook: *(still hugging Malbong)* It's okay, Malbong.

(light turns off and spotlight on Soonja, who is in front of the door. She has been hearing everything. Instead of calling Malsook out, Soonja stays silent)

Narration: That's when I understood why the night before, Malsook said she couldn't leave her husband. Why thousands of other women couldn't leave their husbands. I realized that there existed such a strong, unbreakable bond between all wives and husbands. That there existed something beyond love between them. That they gradually become companions over lovers. And it was that companionship beyond love that kept Malsook with her husband for 32 years, and thousands of other wives with their husbands, in spite of all the conflicts, clashes, and struggles.

< Scene 7 >

Scene changes to next morning. Choonje is on his boat at the shore. Malsook and Soonja enter in their haenyeo uniforms. The two women get on the boat. Choonje starts paddling.

Soonja: Where are we going today?

Malsook: We're going to the deepest part of the South Sea. After all, my husband dumped everything we caught for a month yesterday. So we better start working our butt off.

Soonja: Oh ... Is he okay now?

Malsook: Much better than before. He's trying his best to change. *(smiles)* I'm sorry I left you like that at the market the other day.

Soonja: It's fine. *(pause)* Honestly, I didn't understand why you couldn't just leave your husband. I just yelled at you without even trying to understand why. And you were right. I am too young to understand certain things. I think that's why my mom sent me here - to learn, experience, and see things for myself. *(pause)* You know, told me on my first day here that I'll need some growing up. I didn't believe it then, but now I think I see why.

Malsook: No, I think you've already grown up a lot. Not exactly the way I wanted you to - by watching me cry over my drunk husband - but you did.

Soonja: You know, I used to hate everything here - the sun, the waves, and the seagulls. I never thought I'd come to like them. But now, every morning, when I wake up and see the sun shining so brightly, hear the waves splashing, and the seagulls singing together, I feel like this is home now. I love being here.

Malsook: *(takes Soonja by the hand)* I'm glad you came here.

Soonja: *(smiling)* I'm glad I could meet you here.

Suddenly, the three see a giant lightning and hear a giant storm. It starts raining. The boat starts to move.

Soonja: Oh god! What's going on?

Choonje: I have no idea! The weather caster said there'd be no rain today!

Malsook: Never believe those weather casters! They're all fake! Choonje! Grab the anchor!

Soonja: Ack I'm going to fall!!

Choonje: Hold on to me baby, I'll protect you!

Soonja: *(falls into the water)* Ack noooooooooooooo *drowning noises*

Choonje: Oh my god! My little sunshine fell in the water! I can't swim though!

Malsook: I'll save her! You stay here!

Choonje: Good idea!!! *(Lydia jumps into the water and tries to find Michelle)*

Malsook: *(Lydia spots Michelle) (swims to the sinking unconscious Michelle) (She catches her and hands her over to Choonje)* Here! Get her on the boat!

Malsook: What is that.....? *(John, as jellyfish, comes into scene)* Oh no, why in the world is a jellyfish here?!

John, as jellyfish, stings Malsook on the leg. Malsook starts screaming like crazy.

Soonja: NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The storm gets worse.

Malsook: Go! Go! Leave without me!

Soonja: NO! NO! I'm not leaving without you! *starts crying*

Lydia: There there, don't cry.....You're a strong young woman now. Now hurry and go, the storm's going to devour you if you stay here any longer. And Choonje....

Choonje: *sob* Yes?

Lydia: Take good care of Soonja.

Eric: Alright. *sob* I will. Come, Soonja, we have to go! Or we'll all die!

(Choonje, sobbing, takes control of the ship and unwillingly turns the ship around and sets off, leaving Malsook behind. Soonja is begging to go back. Choonje does not respond, biting his lip as he continues to head towards shore. Malsook sinks down to the bottom of the water. Lights slowly go off.

Narration: It was a tragedy that would stay imprinted in me for the rest of my life. I cried for days and days after that event, like I've never cried before. And that was the last time I ever saw Malsook.

< Scene 8 >

Scene changes to funeral. Malbong is crying his lungs out. Soonja is crying silently on the side.

Malbong: MALSOOOOOOOOOK!!! (*crying hard*) It's all my fault! It's all my fault you died!!!

Choonje walks over to Soonja. He sits down next to her.

Choonje: Hey.

Soonja: Hey.

Choonje: I'm sorry ... I'm sorry I dragged you to the shore. I knew you wanted to save her ...

Soonja: (*cutting him*) I could have saved her. I could have saved her! You coward! You were scared that you'd die if you jumped in the water! And you didn't even let me save her! (*cries*) She died because of me! If only I didn't fall off the boat... If only I jumped in the water... (*crying*)

Choonje: It's not your fault. She saved you because she wanted to. She died happy. You would have made her even more miserable if you jumped in to save her.

Soonja: I can't forgive myself ... I never tried to understand her. I always thought it was stupid that she couldn't leave her drunk husband. (*John is still crying his lungs out*) I judged her without even trying to see why she couldn't leave him. I judged him, too, without even trying to see what could have made him like that. She always tried to show me new things, teach me about the sea, and be like a mother to me. And I always hated her for trying to make me a haenyeo. And when I finally came to understand her, I never got to say sorry. And I never got to thank her either... for doing all the things she did for me... I...

Choonje: It's not your fault. It's not your fault. If she's still the woman I remember, she'll understand. And I know she wouldn't want you to blame yourself like this. (*pats Soonja on the shoulder. Soonja starts crying on Choonje's shoulder*)

Light slowly goes off. Spotlight on Olivia.

Narration: I really did think it was my fault. And it wasn't years later that I finally understood what Choonje meant. And that was when I decided to become a teacher. I wanted to teach kids how to grow up, like how Malsook taught me to grow up. Often times, I see myself in my students. And when they ask me why I decided to become a teacher, I tell them - because I want to learn. Because I know there's still so many things I haven't learned yet. *looks down at her suit*

Suddenly, Choonje, as Soonja's husband, enters the room.

Choonje: Hey honey. Have you seen my tie around here? *(looks at the suit)* Wait, is that your haenyeo suit?

Olivia: Yeah, I found it in my closet here.

Choonje: Oh god, it's been like forever since I first saw you in that. Oh I remember. Hey, did it hurt?

Olivia: *(smiling)* Did what hurt?

Choonje: When you fell from heaven?

Olivia: Hmm... no. I'm used to it now.

Choonje: Hahaha. Come, the kids are waiting.

John appears as a little girl (Soonja & Choonje's daughter)

Daughter: Mommy! When are you coming! We're gonna be late!

Olivia: I'll be right there.

(Choonje exits with John)

Olivia puts her cheek next to the suit. She smiles. She puts the suit back in the closet and exits stage.

Scene.